



Philpott Reservoir 2005



Philpott Reservoir is a 2,880-acre impoundment located near Martinsville Virginia. This reservoir is situated in the mountains of Patrick and Henry Counties, which is a picturesque setting for outdoor enthusiasts. Philpott Reservoir is owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and is managed primarily for flood control and hydroelectric power generation. There is no residential development along its shoreline but there are numerous boat landings and facilities scattered throughout the reservoir.

Black bass (largemouth and smallmouth bass) are the most sought after species by anglers at Philpott Reservoir. According to Virginia Department of game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) electrofishing samples, the largemouth bass comprise the bulk of this fishery outnumbering smallmouth five to one. However, smallmouth are a very popular portion of the fishery and this reservoir does produce many quality smallies. Comparisons from sampling conducted in 1991 show that the largemouth bass population has remained very stable with good numbers of bass in the 2-3 pound range. The smallmouth bass population has declined slightly in number and quality.

Good largemouth bass fishing can be found throughout the reservoir but smallmouth bass densities appear to be greater in the lower end, particularly along the main lake channel. Clear water, especially in the lower half of the lake, can make fishing a challenge. Anglers should look for bass in deeper water and around fallen trees if the area fishing has very clear water. Night fishing can also be productive in shallow water as bass tend to come up shallower after dark.

Black crappie are present in Philpott Reservoir but this lake does not contain high densities of crappie. Crappie recruitment has been consistently low for many years. This reservoir does not have the habitat and characteristics that can maintain a productive crappie fishery. Despite the low number of crappie, fish in the 11-14 inch classes make up the bulk of the population.

Philpott Reservoir has one of the better walleye populations in Virginia. This fishery does not contain many large fish but does support good numbers. Most adult walleye average 16-21 inches. There is no or very limited natural reproduction of walleye so the population is sustained with approximately 144,000 annually stocked fingerling walleye.

The most productive walleye fishing is between April and early June. In March, walleye can often be found in less than 10 feet of water due to spawning. Most walleye spawning concludes by the end of March or first week of April. The headwaters of the reservoir from mile marker 11 up into Smith River, Runett Bag Creek arm, and from mile marker 3 to the dam are all areas walleye congregate during the spawn. Walleye are very light sensitive and prefer dark or shaded habitat. Consequently, anglers need to adjust their tactics accordingly. During daylight hours, many walleye can be found in only a few feet of water in the spring if the water is stained or muddy but will remain deep during the day if the water is clear. The reservoir in March typically has very clear water near the dam but turbid water in the upper reaches of the reservoir. Walleye will only be in

very shallow water near the dam at night but may remain in shallow water the entire day at the opposite end of the reservoir where the water is stained. For those willing to brave the nighttime temperatures of late March, points and cliffs along the main channel up to mile marker 3 are the most productive areas!

After spawning, walleye begin to feed heavily for the next couple of months. Since water temperatures remain cool through April and most of May, walleye are attracted to shallow water to capitalize on food sources. Sunfish species make up a portion of walleyes spring diet and these fish are concentrated in shallow water along the shoreline. Alewives are likely the most important part of the walleyes spring diet. Most alewife spawn at night from late April through June. Alewife spawn along the shoreline at the water's surface. The erratic spawning behavior of the alewife makes them easy targets for the hungry walleye. Walleye are sensitive to light and remain in deeper water during the day but make their way to very shallow water at night to capitalize on the forage. Night fishing with floating or shallow running plugs cast to the shoreline can provide some of the hottest walleye action of the year. Walleye often frequent water less than 2 feet deep during these dark hours. During daylight hours, fish the shoreline contour but in deeper water than at night. As water temperatures increase in late spring and throughout the summer, walleye continually move deeper seeking cooler water. Anglers must fish deeper throughout the summer to capitalize on this fishery. A very important point to remember is fish deeper in clearer water during the day, regardless of season.

VDGIF is conducting a walleye tagging study at Philpott Reservoir. This study was developed to better manage the lake's walleye fishery. Information gathered from the study will give biologists important data concerning walleye catch and harvest rates by anglers. In addition, biologists will gain insight on walleye movement, survival, and population dynamics. Approximately 600 walleye were tagged in 2002-2003. The tags are orange and approximately three inches in length. Each tag is attached to the abdominal area and extends along the exterior portion of the fish. Any tagged walleye caught by anglers should be easily recognized without dissection. Tagged fish do not have to be harvested to collect the reward. Cut or clip tags (do not pull tags loose) from fish you wish to release. Anglers are encouraged to submit any tags collected from walleye to the address printed on the tag. Special envelopes for tag returns have been distributed to the USCOE office and some bait and tackle stores in the Philpott Reservoir area. All tags will have a dollar value (reward amount) that ranges from \$5-\$50.

Rainbow and brown trout, approximately 6 inches in length, were stocked annually for many years but stocking was discontinued in 2003 due to lack of interest and poor survival. The trout fishery at Philpott Reservoir does not have a strong following but there are some very nice trout available to anglers, up to 8 pounds. Trout spend most of their time in deeper water and successful anglers utilize lead core line or down-riggers to capitalize on the fishery. Trout anglers should look for trout in at least 20-50 feet of water. A general rule is to fish deeper as water temperatures increase.

Additional information on Philpott Reservoir facilities can be obtained by contacting the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at 276-629-2703.

Philpott Reservoir Key Findings - 2004

- Catch rates for largemouth bass increased from 51 fish/hr in 2001 to 76 fish/hr in 2004.
- The size structure for largemouth bass changed with fewer adults in the population but recruitment from 2002 and 2003 year classes appears to be very good.
- It is uncertain if the declining quality size bass in the population is a result of increased angler pressure or due to poor recruitment in 1999 and 2000. If the size structure does not improve, new regulations for black bass should be considered.
- Catch rates and size structure for smallmouth bass declined from 9 fish/hr in 1991 and 2001 to 5 fish/hr in 2004. The decline was not unexpected since the largemouth bass population continues to expand.
- Only 10 black crappie were collected during spring electrofishing sampling but that is twice the catch rates for 2001. The size structure for crappie remains very good with RSD values remaining around 80%.
- The crappie population is low but has remained fairly stable since 1991 samples.
- Walleye were sampled with gill nets in November of 2001 and 2004.
- Walleye reach 489 mm at about 2.5 years of age and most males grow very little after reaching this size. Females do attain larger sizes than males.
- Philpott walleye have produced good year classes since 1999 except for the 2004 year class. No YOY walleye were collected during the 2004 fall gill netting indicating the 2004 stocking was not very successful. Other reservoirs sampled in 2004 with gill nets did collect YOY walleye.
- The walleye tagging study revealed walleye are being harvested at a substantial rate. First year tag returns for walleye 18 inches and larger was 19% and 15% for 2002 and 2003 respectively. Post card returns suggest that the catch of walleye was approximately twice that rate.
- Gill netting and electrofishing sampling in 2004 showed a major decline in the number of walleye in the population over 18 inches. This data combined with tagging data indicates anglers are substantially impacting the fishery. As a result, a new regulation for walleye is being considered for implementation in 2006. The new regulation if approved will increase the minimum length limit to 18 inches. Many walleye at Philpott do not grow much after reaching 18 inches so a larger minimum size limit is not recommended.

Management Recommendations

- Continue monitoring the black bass population to see if a regulation change is necessary.
- Change minimum size limit for walleye to 18 inches.
- Continue annual stockings 144,000 walleye, if available.
- Consider tagging additional walleye to monitor angler impacts.